

## [Essie Watts]

October 11, 1939

Essie Watts (White)

Huntersville, N. C.

Mary P. Wilson, Writer

Dudly W. Crawford, Revisor Original Names Changed Names

Essie Watts Eva Wane

Pitty Watts Peg Wane

Ethel Mable

Barney Watts Ben Wane C93 1/22/41 - N.C.

1

She was a small woman and the tired droop of her shoulders gave her a Midget—like appearance. The long cotton sack, with a shoulder strap made from a flour sack, was empty. An old straw hat, with the brim turned up all round, made a frame for the straggly, mouse colored hair and weather—beaten face.

“I told Jewel, I bet that was you soon as I seen you coming.” When Eva Wane smiled, one had to see her toothless gums, but there was something in her smile that gave her a young and care—free appearance. “You ain't never told as a lie and when you said you'd come I knowed you'd be here.”

“Where's the other children?” I asked. “Don't they help you pick cotton?”

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"No—you know Peg ain't going to do nothing if she can get out of it. I've got several children at home now. I could make right much in a day if they would all help me but I can't hardly get more than one to come. I'll smoke one of your cigarettes, if you don't care"—she reached for the pack with a nervous hand; chapped and calloused.

"Ain't I a pretty thing? running around in this old dirty pink dress, wearing Mables old blue shirt to keep the sun off. I'm as black as an Indian now but the sun still blisters me.

2

I'm much happier than when I was selling whiskey. If you ain't never done it, you don't know what it means. I was scared all the time. I didn't dare keep none in my house but I was worried every time I heard a car motor. I admit I lived good but I'd rather be like I am now, hungry most of the time; I can sleep when I go to bed.

"I reckon you heard about the officers putting my daughter Mable in the Industrial Home for two years. You see, all of us have to take shots [?] for syphilis every Tuesday and Mable was so busy running around with the men she didn't go regular. The Doctor reported her and the welfare people came after her. They let her off the first time because she promised to take her shots. The last time she got two years. But do you know what she did? she locked a nurse in a closet down there at the school yesterday and come home.

"Seems like my family likes to be behind bars. My old man is in Atlanta now serving his third term and my oldest boy got ninety days for cutting off the air on a freight train so he could get off. He was lucky at that for the other boy with him got a two year suspended sentence.

"I'm trying every way I know to live right now. It's a hard road. The welfare helps me some but if it wasn't for the work I do myself, we'd fare worse than we do. I've been trying to get someone to let me pick their peas for part of them; it seems like everyone wants all

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they have for themselves. I'm determined to do something so I can stay away from selling liquor.

3

"You know how them gals of mine run around with men. They make good money but that ain't doing a thing but ruining their health and spreading disease. I don't know where we got it, even my small children have to take shots, same as I do. I ain't never run around with men but some says [?] I do things just as bad. I just don't know, when my children get to crying for something to eat, I ain't responsible for how I get it.

"I hitch—hike to Charlotte every two weeks after those supplies the welfare gives me—then I have to hitch—hike back with them. It ain't much I got but I couldn't get along without it. Maybe I could do better when my baby gets old enough to go to school. Like it is now, I have to take in washing and work out in the field for someone who lives close by.

"I know I ain't lived right and I've done a poor job of raising my children. I've got one girl married. Syphilis was the cause of her losing one of her children last year. She's got two more and they seem to be strong and healthy.

"I tried to make a complete change for the better when I moved out here in the country. As long as I lived right in town I couldn't keep my children at home. They are afraid to go now. That Chain gang camp makes them stay at home. It's supposed to be against the law to go on the camp premises but we walk through because it is so much nearer than going around the road.

"I should be picking cotton right now instead of standing here running my tongue. My back feels like it is going to break. Some days it don't bother me much; then again, 4 I can't hardly go, it hurts so bad. I ought not to mind working since I've had it to do all my life but any woman who has nine children as fast as I did ain't able to do much hard work.

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"I ain't heard a word from Ben since he went to Atlanta this time. He always wrote when he was in the pen before. I wrote to him one time and after he didn't answer my letter, I didn't bother to write no more. If he feels that way about me after all these years I ain't going to worry about it.

"What I'm worrying about is who is going to be our next President. I aim to vote for Roosevelt and I do hope he will get back in. What will become of poor people, if he don't, is a mystery to me."